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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the instruction of adult performance outcomes and life skills in classes for students with mental disabilities. Basic considerations in teaching life skills include teaching for lifelong learning, teaching for relevancy, and teaching beyond textbooks and classrooms. Several strategies have contributed to the success of programs utilizing a life skills theme. These include use of a nontraditional curriculum, such as the Adult Performance Level (APL) Curriculum Model. The APL model offers a basic structure by which individual schools can develop life skills programs which are relevant to their communities. The curriculum was developed on the premise that adult competency is a function of both individual capabilities and societal requirements. Functional competence in life skills is described as a set of skills (reading, writing, listening/speaking, computation, problem solving, and interpersonal relations) applied to a set of general knowledge areas (consumer economics, health, occupational knowledge, community resources, and government and law). The implementation of a life skills program involves the cooperation of interested and committed school personnel, students, and community members. Four figures are included. (JDD)

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Chapter Three

Applying Curriculum For The Instruction of Life Skills

Mary E. Cronin

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OVERVIEW

The purpose of both formal and informal education is to produce skilled and knowledgeable adults who successfully contribute to their communities. Various terms are used in the literature which relate to this concept--independent living, survival literacy, life skills, experienced-based learning, survival skills, coping skills, daily living skills, job skills, functional skills, and adult functioning skills. The terms essentially point to one main idea, that is, the ability to use skills and knowledge with the functional competence needed in meeting the requirement of successful adult living. One of the most extensive research programs, the Adult Performance Level Project (APL Project, 1975), states that many skills are needed to survive and function competently in today's world. Many of the skills demonstrated by functionally competent adults seem so easy and natural that they are often taken for granted. Such skills include calling for a doctor's appointment, filling out a job application, asking for directions to a friend's house, calculating discounts on merchandise when shopping, or reading grocery ads in the newspaper. All these skills, and many more, appear elementary yet many students (handicapped or not) leave our school systems unable to perform the simplest everyday task (Schinke & Gilchrist, 1984; Olen, 1984; Daniels & Wiederholt, 1986).

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the instruction of adult performance outcomes and life skills in classes for students with mental disabilities. Basic considerations in teaching life skills to students with mental disabilities will be discussed first. The Best Practices section will outline a framework from which to develop a program in teaching life skills that can be molded by teachers, students, and administrators to meet the unique needs of the student, school, and community in which it will be taught. Finally, a summary statement will be given.

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

In developing the theoretical framework from which to outline the best practices in teaching adult life skills to students with mental disabilities, several considerations need to be addressed that are crucial to success in classroom implementation. Disregard for these can impede the full participation of students in real life experiences. These concepts include a) teaching for lifelong learning, b) teaching for relevancy, and c) teaching beyond textbooks and classrooms.

Teaching For Life Long Learning

Dave (1975) states that life long education is a comprehensive concept which includes formal, informal, and nonformal learning extended throughout the life span of an individual to attain the fullest possible development in personal, social, and professional growth. This concept, as Dave sees it, views education as a holistic adventure and includes learning that occurs in the home, school, community, and workplace, or that results from mass media. In essence, life long education is the ability and desire to learn throughout life. It is more than the learning that occurs between the hours of 8 and 3, Monday through Friday, during the months of September through May, up to the age of 18. Life long education relates to that learning which takes place all the time (Smith, 1983) and it is continuous and concurrent (Dave, 1975; Skager & Dave, 1977).

Lifelong education should be flexible and diverse in content, learning tools, techniques and in the time of learning. Most importantly, the ultimate goal of lifelong education is to maintain and improve the quality of life.

Teaching For Relevancy

One of the most potent teaching strategies with any student is teaching for relevancy. A student who can relate academic concepts to his or her own experiences is more apt to understand the concept and be able to apply it. They will then live out the knowledge obtained from the classroom and use it in various situations in the home and community.

Topics and materials for teaching academic concepts which are relevant to students can also be a very powerful motivator. Students who have difficulty with the abstract concepts that some academic course work presents react with curiosity and enthusiasm to nontraditional topics and methods. School and academic assignments take on a different meaning from the student's perspective, moving from "What I have to do for school" to "What I am learning for me." Programs and curricula developed around relevant topics may not have the same effect on every student; relevancy is personally-defined can sometimes be very different for each pupil in a class. Nevertheless, the motivation to attend classes and the need to know what is being taught which are generated by a relevant curriculum point to the importance of rethinking our use of traditional methods and materials with special education populations and focusing more on a functional, life skill orientation.

Teaching Beyond Textbooks and Classrooms

Textbooks and classrooms can be our biggest deterrent to teaching students. Many teachers will not "teach" if they do not have a textbook, teacher's manual, ready-made guides, and lesson plans. One does not need four years of college training and professional preparation to follow a teacher's manual and pass out textbooks, yet many individuals feel that that is the only way they can teach. Unfortunately, many of the tools provided for us as teachers have become our crutch. A common reason cited for not going beyond the textbooks is the lack of time.

Textbook usage is only one approach to cover subject matter. We need to train teachers to go beyond textbooks and the confines of a classroom and encourage their attempts to do so. Teaching beyond the classic textbook classroom setup will not necessarily be any easier, but it might be exciting for both teachers and students (McClure, Cook, & Thompson, 1977). That excitement is ingrained in the impact upon and change that takes place within a student's life. The opportunities that you afford students outside the traditional classroom setting and the knowledge and skills learned beyond the textbook approach will be remembered long after they leave formal schooling.

BEST PRACTICES

Several strategies have contributed to the success of programs utilizing a life skills theme. This section will discuss various strategies associated with successful programs which have been contributed by students, teachers, professionals, and parents. Key elements include successful implementation strategies for life skills programs and an example of a nontraditional curriculum (APL Curriculum Model).

APL Curriculum Model

The Adult Performance Level Curriculum (APL, 1975) is an adult basic education curriculum which was developed by the University of Texas at Austin. The APL model describes literacy in functional terms. The focus of the curriculum is on the competencies and skills necessary for survival in everyday situations. The skills identified by the extensive study that went into the development of this program are considered integral for success: reading, writing, listening/speaking, computation, problem solving, and interpersonal relations. These skills are applied within the framework of the curriculum to the general content areas of (a) Consumer Economics, (b) Health, (c) Occupational Knowledge, (d) Community Resources, and (e) Government and Law (see Figures 1-3). The interrelationship of skills and knowledge areas produced the 42 life skills of the APL Curriculum. These 42 objectives are the core elements in planning instruction (see Figure 4).

The APL Curriculum was developed on the premise that adult competency is a function of both individual capabilities and societal requirements (APL, 1975). However, Wiederholt and Larsen (1983) caution that a person could be knowledgeable about a subject and possess an adequate level of skills but not use this knowledge or these skills effectively..

Soon after the implementation of the APL Curriculum in adult learning centers, professionals questioned waiting to teach individuals these skills until they are in adult education. Why can't this program be used to prepare students for adulthood by incorporating the life skills into the educational system? The APL Adaptation and Modification Project at the Region XIII Service Center in Austin, Texas, under the direction of Ann LaQuey initiated this concept (LaQuey, 1981). It has been used in special education programs in Texas and subsequently adapted and refined by some parishes (counties) in southeastern Louisiana. As the basic program is used, teachers and administrators are encouraged to refine the life skills and personalize the curriculum. The presentation of the APL structure and life skills is meant as a core guide by which individual schools or school districts can individualize the programs to meet their specific needs. Duplicating a program from another state or a neighboring district may not be the best practice for your students but adapting a life skills program to meet the demands of a given community or environment in which they live would be good practice.

As technology advances, so should the curriculum. It should be critiqued, updated, and be viewed as in a constant state of revision as teachers and students work with it every year. For example, students are and will be expected to use many types of automated equipment. Many of them are mini-computers. They are used for banking, drinks and snacks, postal service, gas pumps, microwave ovens, coffee makers, and so forth. As these types of everyday items change, the curriculum needs to change to prepare the students for the actual skills involved (e.g. using different types of key pads to punch in the needed information, knowing the meaning of different abbreviations on the key pads, etc.).

One skill area in the basic APL structure which needs special emphasis when used with adolescents with mental disabilities is interpersonal relations. Many curriculum developers feel that additional attention needs to be given to this life skill area. Additional information on the development of social skills activities can be found in the Cartledge and Milburn (1986), Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershal, and Klein (1980), McGinnis and Goldstein (1984) and Walter, Todis, Holmes, and Horton (1988).

Figure 1

APL MODEL OF FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCY: EXAMPLES OF TASKS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

	CONSUMER ECONOMICS	OCCUPATIONAL KNOWLEDGE	HEALTH	COMMUNITY RESOURCES	GOVERNMENT AND LAW
READING	Look for ads in the newspaper for toys	Read books from library on various occupations	Read the school lunch menu	Find television listing in the TV Guide	Student reads road signs and understands what they mean
WRITING	Write prices of items to be purchased	Write the specific tasks involved in perfoming one of the classroom jobs	Keep a diary of food you eat in each food group each day	Complete an application to play on a little league team	Write a letter to the Mayor inviting him/her to visit your school
SPEAKING, LISTENING, VIEWING	Listen to bank official talk about savings accounts	Call newspaper in town to inquire about delivering papers in your neighborhood	View a film on brushing teeth	Practice the use of 911 emergency number	Discuss park playground improvements with the Mayor
PROBLEM-SOLVING	Decide if you have enough coins to make a purchase from a vending machine	Decide which job in the classroom you do best	Role play what one should do if you have a stomach ache	Role play the times you would use a 911 emergency number	Find the city hall on the map. Decide whether you will walk or drive
INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS	Ask for help finding items in a grocery store	Ask a student in the class to assist you with a classroom job	Ask the school nurse how to take care of mosquito bites	Call the movie theater and ask the performance times of a movie	Role play asking a policeman for help if lost
COMPUTA-TION	Compute the cost of a box of cereal using a coupon	Calculate how much you would make on a paper route at $3 per hour for 5 hours per week	Compute the price of one tube of toothpaste if they are on sale-3 for $1	Compute the complete cost of going to the movie (adm., food, transp.)	Compute tax on a candy bar

Figure 2

APL MODEL OF FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCY: EXAMPLES OF TASKS

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

	CONSUMER ECONOMICS	OCCUPATIONAL KNOWLEDGE	HEALTH	COMMUNITY RESOURCES	GOVERNMENT AND LAW
READING	Read an ad for a sale locating name of store, location, phone #, and price of item	Read a job description	Locates poison control numbers in phone book	Use phone book to locate recreational program in community	Locates and reads list of state and U.S. congressman
WRITING	Fill out a magazine order form completely	Practice writing abbreviations for words	Write a menu for a balanced diet	Write a letter to TV station about a program they just cancelled	Fill out voter registration form
SPEAKING, LISTENING, VIEWING	Discuss saving versus spending money	Discuss reasons why we work	Listens to positive and negative feed-back on personal appearance	Call library to find out if they have a certain book	Discuss why we need to vote
PROBLEM-SOLVING	Given $10 for the evening, which activity would you choose: movies, bowling, or pizza	Decides on job environment . . . inside, outside, desk, travel, etc.	Role play appropriate be-havior for various places (movies, church, restaurant)	Locate the skating rink on a city map and decide the best way to get there	Decide what items have state and/or local tax
INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS	Asks sales person for help in purchasing jeans	Lists questions they would ask in job interview	Discuss honesty, trust, and promise. Define each	Calls skating rink to inquire about hours	Call to find out what precint you live in
COMPUTA-TION	Computes the sales tax on a pair of jeans	Compute net income	Calculates and compares the prices of hair washing products	Calculates bus fare to and from the teen center	Calculate the cost of getting a driver's license (fee, gas)

Figure 3

APL MODEL OF FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCY: EXAMPLES OF TASKS

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

	CONSUMER ECONOMICS	OCCUPATIONAL KNOWLEDGE	HEALTH	COMMUNITY RESOURCES	GOVERNMENT AND LAW
READING	Read and compare prices of grocery store ads	Reads a job description and qualifications	Read directions on cough syrup bottle	Read a movie schedule	Obtain and read a sales tax sheet for your country/state
WRITING	Write a check for amount of purchase	Complete a job application	Write a grocery list for the week including all the food groups	List government & community employ-ment agencies from phone book	Apply for a work permit
SPEAKING, LISTENING, VIEWING	Explain the difference between charge, check, and cash purchases	Role play calling your boss when ill	Practice calling a doctor's office for an appointment	Listen to a state patrolman talk about highway driving	Describe an accident
PROBLEM-SOLVING	Decide what amount you can afford to rent an apartment	Decide what to wear to a job interview	Decide whether you should go to community clinic or hospital for an injury	Role play what you would do if your car broke down	Decide which candidate to vote for
INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS	Ask sales person if they have a layaway and the costs involved	Role play a mock interview	Ask a pharmicist about a prescription	Ask directions to a video store	Call legal aid and ask what services are available
COMPUTA-TION	Calculate and compare savings on items from different stores	Calculate paycheck deductions	Decide how many times a day to take a pill	Compute cost of doing laundry in a laundromat vs. home	Calculate the cost of a speeding ticket

Figure 4

Adult Performance Level
42 Life Skills

I. Consumer Economics
   1. Counting and Converting
   2. Consumer Fraud
   3. Money Management
   4. Income Tax
   5. Care/Upkeep of Personal Possessions
   6. Comparison Shopping
   7. Catalog Ordering
   8. Advertising Techniques
   9. Ordering Food
   10. Housing/Utilities
   11. Car Buying/Maintenance
   12. Insurance
   13. Using Credit
   14. World Resource
   15. Banking Services
   16. Measuring and Metrics

II. Community Resources
   17. Public Assistance Program
   18. Recreation
   19. Information and Aid
   20. Mass Media/Public Opinion
   21. Driving
   22. Transportation

III. Health
   23. Safety Measures/Emergencies and First Aid
   24. Preventive Care and Health Maintenance
   25. Drug Control/Drug Abuse
   26. The Adolescent
   27. Self
   28. Marriage and the Family
   29. Parenting and Family Planning
   30. Pregnancy and Childbirth
   31. Child Rearing
   32. Nutrition/Food Preparation

IV. Occupational Knowledge
   33. Job Selection and Satisfaction
   34. Sources of Employment
   35. Job Appliations and Interviews
   36. Employment Agencies
   37. Effective Job Behavior
   38. Financial and Legal Aspects of Employment

V. Government and Law
   39. Government Structure and Function
   40. Citizen Rights and Duties
   41. Criminal and Civil Law
   42. Legal Documents

One skill area in the basic APL structure which needs special emphasis when used with adolescents with mental disabilities is interpersonal relations. Many curriculum developers feel that additional attention needs to be given to this life skill area. Additional information on the development of social skills activities can be found in the Cartledge and Milburn (1986), Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershal, and Klein (1980), McGinnis and Goldstein (1984) and Walter, Todis, Holmes, and Horton (1988).

Implementation of a Life Skills Program

The crucial step in the success of any program is putting it into practice. The implementation of a life skills program involves the cooperation of interested and committed school personnel (administration and teachers), students, and various community members.

School Personnel

The development and implementation of a life skills program requires teachers and administrators to be flexible and open to new and different ideas. Life skills programs have been set up in both self-contained and resource classrooms using various scheduling formats. They have also been used in connection with vocational training programs at the secondary level. In larger schools where there are multiple special education classes, the life skills curriculum has been departmentalized according to the various content areas (e.g. Consumer Economics, Health, etc.) Each school needs to decide how the program will operate within their unique situation to meet the needs of the students.

The teacher's role in many cases will change to that of a consultant or manager of learning. Content and information may not always come out of the traditional classroom textbook but instead may be found in a telephone book, on food and product cartons, during field trips, listening to guest speakers, or reading a state driving manual (Bunney, Cronin, Hale & McEntire, 1980). This involves resourcefulness, creativity, and, especially during the initial stages, time and effort. If developed properly, this type of program requires a substantial amount of planning and start-up time.

Materials needed for programs such as these can include old and new items. Teachers who are setting up life skills classrooms become savers and collectors. Items to be thrown away around their houses become valuable teaching tools: cartons, labels, newspapers, coupons, magazines, "junk mail", old cash register tapes--anything that has the potential of teaching or demonstrating a skill used in everyday living. It is crucial to collect items from neighborhood businesses and government offices that you patronize such as old menus from restaurants, sample applications from jobs the students might have applied for, sample teaching packets from banks and savings and loans, brochures from gas stations and car dealerships (e.g., guidelines for car maintenance or tips on buying a car), pamphlets from utility companies on ways to use energy wisely, sample government applications and forms (social security, general license, IRS, draft registration, etc.) and drivers manuals from the state. As you might expect, the list of collectibles can be lengthy, but it should always be community-specific (i.e., relate to the student's environment).

A life skills classroom can be set up in several ways. One popular option is to obtain enough containers (e.g., library magazine boxes, dress/shirt

boxes) for each life skill in the curriculum. This allows you to store all the items you have been collecting and saving in an organized manner. Labeling the containers and grouping them according to life skill content areas (e.g., Consumer Economics, Health, etc.) affords both the teacher and the students easy access to the materials as they need them.

Commercial materials are being developed in all of the life skill areas. More published materials are being written on lower reading levels which are helpful to many students. It is difficult and expensive to build a life skills program with commercial materials only. Many times, as with any commercial program, the materials will address some but not all the needs of the students. A balance of teacher collected, teacher-made, and commercial materials needs to be established for each situation. A list of companies that publish life skills materials is located in the appendix to this chapter.

Students

The student is critical to the successful implementation of a life skills program. In many cases school takes on new meaning for the student. The student becomes actively involved in the learning process. Responsibility and learning to make choices become major themes throughout the curriculum. Students are encouraged to choose life skills they want to learn rather than being assigned or told what areas to study. If teachers or administrators are uneasy about this concept they might want to start slowly by limiting student choices to two or three in each area until the students can handle more. Successful programs have found that when students are involved in the decision making process, motivation to learn is high. Students become aware that proposed activities are worth doing and, most importantly, they realize the significance of learning the material. The students also realize that the curriculum and materials are responding to their needs as a learner rather than offering standardized coursework that all students must follow.

Community Involvement

Community involvement in a life skills program can involve two significant groups of people - the school community and the neighborhood community. Each group can participate through providing field trip sites, guest speakers, and resource people. In general, communities welcome student involvement as there are benefits for both students and community. Initially, it is advised to start within the school community with younger or lower functioning students and "graduate" to the neighborhood community as their skills and interests mature.

Many businesses and individuals within communities have contributed to efforts to teach life skills by responding to needs assessment questionnaires. This type of evaluation process pinpoints

1. The specific skills needed for survival in that community.

2. The entry level skills associated with jobs that are available to students for either training or future employment after leaving the system.

In concluding this section a few points need to be stressed. Although this model has been in place in only a few parishes (school districts) in southeastern

Louisiana for the last 3 - 4 years, many observations can be shared regarding the development and implementation of a life skills curriculum. The following reflections need to be seriously considered before contemplating a life skills program. First, the program has been highly motivating for the students due to use of relevant topics and materials that have meaning to their daily lives. Next, the students realize that the curriculum is meeting their needs to survive in their community. Third, the curriculum is a flexible and versatile approach to individualizing. Finally, the curriculum does require, initially, teacher time and creativity; therefore, it requires teacher commitment. Even though some teachers may not relish the thought of more time, the results in student enthusiasm and progress is the reinforcement that, as teachers, we ultimately seek.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss teaching life skills to students with mental disabilities. The first step in setting up such programs includes becoming aware of concepts of lifelong learning and of how this contributes to the goal of teaching students with mental disabilities to maintain and improve the quality of their lives. Furthermore, school personnel must be more cognizant of the value of teaching relevant information to students using nontraditional materials and methods.

The APL curriculum model offers a basic structure by which individual schools and districts can develop life skills programs which are relevant to their communities. The APL curriculum was developed on the premise that adult competency is a function of both individual capabilities and societal requirements (APL, 1975). Functional competence in life skills, as developed by APL, is seen as two dimensional and is described as a set of skills (reading, writing, listening/speaking, computation, problem solving, and interpersonal relations) applied to a set of general knowledge areas (consumer economics, health, occupational knowledge, community resources, and government and law). Wiederholt and Larsen (1983) emphasize that knowledge and skills acquisition must be extended beyond classroom experiences and applied in various real world situations.

School personnel, students, and community play a significant part in the successful implementation of a life skills program. The school needs to be flexible and open to new and different ideas. Teachers need to be managers of learning, coordinating many different learning experiences in the classroom. In addition, they need to move away from heavily relying on textbooks to using a variety of environmental materials for hands on learning. Students need to be given the opportunity to be actively engaged in their learning and be involved in some of the decisions regarding their programs. The students' communities, both school and neighborhood, need to be tapped as valuable resources for obtaining materials and people, thus enhancing the development of life skills.

A life skills approach to teaching mentally disabled populations holds much promise. If we are to fulfill our mission of preparing students for multiple subseqent environments after they exit school, then programs of this nature need to be given serious consideration.

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Appendix

A SAMPLING OF LIFE SKILLS INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Cambridge Book Company. Improving Math Competence. Educational Design Inc., New York

Computer Age Education, Inc., 5225 Wisconsin Ave, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20015

Computer Island, 227 Hampton Green, Staten Island, NY 10312

DLM Teaching Resources, One DLM Park, Allen, Texas 75002

Edmark Associates, Becoming Independent Series. Bellevue, WA

Fearon Education, 19 Davis Dr., Belmont, CA 94002

Follett Publishing Co., Chicago, IL

Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York

Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York

Ideal School Supply Co., Oak Lawn, IL 60453

Janus Book Publishers, Hayward, CA

LKP Consumer Survival Series, 1315 W. Balmont Ave., Chicago, IL 60657

Mafex Associates Consumer Education Series, Box 519, Johnstown, PA 15907

Modern Curriculum Press, 13900 Prospect Rd., Cleveland, OH 44136

New Readers Press, Be Informed Series, Syracuse, New York

Pitman Learning, Inc., 6 Davis Drive, Belmont, CA 94002

Quercus Corporation, 2768 Pineridge Rd., Castro Valley, CA 94546

Frank E. Richards Pub. Co., Box 66, Phoenix, NY 13135

Scholastic Book Services Functional Literacy Program, 50 W. 44th St., New York, NY 10036

Steck-Vaughn Co., 807 Brazos, Austin, TX 78701

Teachers Support Software, Inc., P.O. Box 7125, Gainesville, FL 32605

Trend Enterprises, Inc., P.O. Box 64073, St. Paul, MN 55164